

June 12, 1944

TO George S. Pfaus  
Area Director  
War Manpower Commission

FROM Roy E. Norris  
Industrial Secretary  
New Jersey Urban League

SUBJECT Atlas Foundry

Consideration of the joint utilization survey of Atlas Foundry made by Mr. John Rapp, Manpower Utilization Consultant, War Manpower Commission, and Mr. E. A. Ward, Production Service Specialist of the War Production Board, was given at a meeting held at the Area Office of the War Manpower Commission on May 11, 1944. Present were:

Mr. George S. Pfaus, Area Director, War Manpower Commission  
Mr. John Rapp, Manpower Utilization Consultant  
Mr. E. A. Ward, Production Service Specialist of WPB  
Mr. E. Shanklin, Representative of WPB  
Ensign James O'Brien, Labor Supply Officer, USN  
Mr. Harold Lett, Executive Secretary, N. J. Urban League  
Mr. Roy Norris, Industrial Secretary, N. J. Urban League  
Mr. W. K. Mantz, President, Atlas Foundry  
Mr. Frank B. Mundy, General Manager, Atlas Foundry  
Mr. Anton Cocco, Shop Steward, Atlas Foundry  
Mr. Cotty, Represented Major Ballou - Army Ordnance

Discussion of the utilization report, with its recommendations, disclosed great need for intensive work on the problem of excessive absenteeism at Atlas Foundry. Mr. Cocco had been served notice that the night shift would strike on May 13th if the shift was not granted a wage increase. Other statements made it apparent that there were many unfavorable factors operating in the situations at Atlas. Mr. Pfaus' request that the New Jersey Urban League assist in the solution of the absentee problem at Atlas, was readily accepted by Mr. Norris, Industrial Secretary.

Work of the Industrial Secretary has included the following contacts:

Visits to Atlas Plant	7
Talks to group of workers	3
Discussion with individual workers	3
Meeting with representatives of foundries, union representatives, and workers	<u>1</u> <u>7</u>
Meetings in Urban League office with Atlas workers	4
With groups of workers	1
With individuals	<u>3</u> <u>4</u>

Meetings elsewhere

1

Irvington Chamber of Commerce  
meeting of committee of Foundry  
Presidents, Union Representatives,  
Worker Representatives

1

12

A number of telephone calls were also made to or from persons from whom information was needed, or to whom information should be given.

Developments were as follows:

1. Initial visit to Atlas Foundry on May 12, on eve of day set for strike, resulted in workers' decision not to strike, and to meet at Urban League office the following Monday for discussion of problems and grievances.
2. Meeting - Urban League office on May 15th disclosed:
  - (a) no classification for chippers, burners, and grinders - all classified at present and paid as common laborers.
  - (b) Union is interested in benefits to moulders only.
  - (c) Pay too low
  - (d) Constant "brush off" from representatives of Atlas management.
  - (e) Under-cover and misleading handling by Management of individual worker's grievances.
  - (f) Dissatisfaction over predominance of Negroes in hard, heavy, hot work, and predominance of whites in the cooler, lighter work of the cleaning room.
  - (g) Dissatisfaction over physical working environment - smoke particularly.
  - (h) Dissatisfaction over non-recognition of the few men who "carry-on" regardless of how few men show up for work.
3. The Industrial Secretary conferred with Mr. Mantz on May 16th and reported the basic psychological causes for excessive absenteeism and unrest among the workers at Atlas Foundry. At this time the following recommendations were made:
  - (a) That an increase in money received by workers be worked out for those workers classified as common laborers.
  - (b) That extra recognition be given in some form to the workers who carry on the work regardless of how few men show up.

- (c) That definite and clear statements be made to workers from Management, with one interpretation that will not be changed by different individuals in Management.
  - (d) That the ventilating system be corrected to carry off smoke from the "pouring room".
  - (e) That concrete evidence be given Negro workers that Management does not attempt to have Negroes do the hot, heavy, dirty work, and white men do the cooler, cleaner, and less dangerous work.
  - (f) That classifications be established, with proper wage differentials, for chippers, burners, welders, and grinders, etc.
  - (g) That the Union be urged to recognize its Negro members and attend to their grievances, give them proper notice of meetings - in the interest of the efficiency of the operation of the whole plant.
4. A few workers, after talking with Mr. Mundy on May 16th and 18th, became angry and decided that Atlas would not give more money and that their pledge to Mr. Norris to wait 30 days for negotiations, would be futile. They decided to make Friday, May 19th, their last work night at Atlas until a raise was actually given.
5. Messrs. John Rapp and Harry Shanklin were called from time to time about (1) current wages for the industry and what the War Labor Board and the Office of Price Administration might decide in case of a request for wage increase at Atlas, (2) discussion of general progress in this case.
6. Several workers were contacted by Mr. Norris to discuss the significance of the "walk-out".

The men were completely emotional about their grievances. So much resistance was evident that it appeared unwise to attempt a lengthy discussion but to allow time and progress of case to ease their tension.

The men were asked to keep in touch with Mr. Norris pending possible progress at a meeting to be held in Mr. Mantz' office on the following Wednesday.

7. The meeting in Mr. Mantz' office was attended by Messrs. Mantz, Mundy, Jeannette, and four workers from Atlas and one other foundry. Arguments and counter-arguments were made. Atlas workers were given no assurance that anything could be done for them. Mr. Mantz questioned whether increased wages would relieve problems of absenteeism and keep workers now employed. Messrs. Jeannette and Norris insisted on some definite statement that would give the workers something to grasp hold of. Mr. Mantz and Mr. Edginger, President of another foundry, were of the opinion that the foundries in this area would refuse to or are unable to grant any form of wage increment unless a request were made for a joint increase of wages and prices. Messrs. Norris and Jeannette pressed for a statement as to whether a joint wage increase and price relief petition would be filed with OPA and WLB, since price relief apparently was what the foundries felt would be absolutely necessary before any additional wages could be given.

It was decided that this point would be discussed further at a meeting on Wednesday, May 24th, at the Chamber of Commerce in Irvington.

Mr. Jeannette reviewed the discussion he had with the foundry operators last year at the time the present Union contract was being negotiated. He pointed out that at that time he insisted something should be done for the common laborers and that there would be trouble if the "Common laborers" did not get job classifications and increase in wages. The foundry owners offered job classifications or a five cent increase in pay and insisted that both could not be given. Mr. Norris clarified his role in the picture at this point by pointing out that he is neither representing any labor organizations nor management, but a neutral agency attempting to analyze the psychological attitudes and underlying causes of the bad situation at Atlas and that his recommendations are based on an analysis of those psychological factors involved and remedies for them.

8. Mr. Norris went to Atlas on Thursday, May 25th, to reach the members of the night gang who came that afternoon for their pay. Some twelve men assembled outside of the plant waiting to be admitted for their checks. Mr. Norris talked with them about the progress that had been made since he last saw them in a group. There was impatience on the part of the men because no definite promise of an increase was made by Atlas management. Mr. Mants came out and joined Mr. Norris in talking with the men. Mr. Norris directed questions that the men had raised directly to Mr. Mants. This apparently was a rare occasion at Atlas for the president of the company and the workers to come face to face about their problems. Mr. Mants pointed out that the workers could not expect any increment for at least several weeks, or possibly two months, even if a request for permission to do so was made by Atlas. Several of the men had secured employment elsewhere and it was apparent that the whole group had decided to act as a unit and quit. They left in a few minutes with their checks and their belongings. Two of the men indicated to Mr. Norris that they would appreciate it if he would keep them in mind since they did not prefer to leave Atlas but were doing so because of circumstances. It appeared that group pressure was being exerted on them to quit if the majority of the night gang agreed to quit.

9. On May 31st the meeting at the Irvington Chamber of Commerce was attended by Mr. Mants and presidents of two other foundries, Messrs Jeannette and Stein, Union officials, Mr. Norris, and six workers representing workers in three plants. It was apparent that the foundries' operators had just gotten together for a meeting. Later it was stated that two hours before, presidents of twenty foundries in the Greater Newark area had met to discuss the advisability of a joint request for wage increases and price relief. The decision of these twenty operators was that the foundries are unable to pay more money and that there is no justification to make the mentioned joint request.

The discussion became hot with statements made by workers and union officials about the conditions in the foundries in the past years. Mr. Jeannette stated that it was not his intention to reopen the union contract at this time but rather to use this emergency of absenteeism and walkouts as an opportunity to point out to the foundry operators the necessity of doing something to bring their business up out of the mire of bad working conditions that it has been in for so many years. Mr. Jeannette felt that the foundries should use the war emergency which is a period in

which they can get higher prices for their articles, to attempt to do so and make it possible to pay higher wages to their workers. Mr. Morris clarified his role for the benefit of the workers present who had not been present at previous meetings, and continued to point out that something must be done about the legitimate grievances of some of the workers. Recognizing that it is not a question of where blame may be placed, he insisted that all parties should remedy this situation in which the causes give rise to absenteeism, quitting and general dissatisfaction among workers.

Job classification was mentioned as one step in the right direction. This step not to be thought of as a remedy; but in view of the decision of the twenty foundry operators, the next best thing at this time. Mr. Mantz promised that about Monday of next week (June 5) he would analyze the jobs of all workers in his plant and see what he could do for individuals. Mr. Jeannette asked that he be allowed to work with Mr. Mantz on this job contract. To this Mr. Mantz agreed.

ELABORATION OF INITIAL CONTACTS WITH ATLAS' WORKERS  
WHICH LED UP TO INDUSTRIAL SECRETARY'S RECOMMENDATIONS

Re: Visit to Atlas Foundry, May 12, 1944 - 8:00 p.m.

1. Talk with individual Negro and whiteworkers of the night gang and a talk with most of the workers assembled on the floor for about ten minutes disclosed many problems and unwholesome attitudes among the men regarding:

- a. Insufficient money
- b. Unequal pay for equal work
- c. Numerous attitudes that made it apparent that a meeting would be necessary in order to get at the truth and the real meaning of these attitudes.

The men slowly decided not to strike as they had planned to do, but to come to the League's office on Monday for discussion of their problems and some better plan.

Re: Meeting at Urban League Office on May 15, 1944 - 2:00 p.m.

There were seven workers present, each one an almost distinct personality type which indicated a good range of worker-feeling that exists among the total night crew. Statements were made and supported by the workers. Real frustration was in evidence, but the men talked freely and an better support was established, determined the crux of their situation.

Wage Rate "too low":

The workers' main grievance is inadequate wages. Notwithstanding the fact that some of the men do not work the maximum amount of time, which would give them more money, they do realize and insist that the work is so hard and the hours so long that they feel quite helpless in the face of having to work a full week for the amount of money that even a full week would give them. This very definitely causes them to be absent when they are very tired, the low pay being no incentive to return, and the aggravation caused by their inability to get more money there adding mental strain to recognized physical fatigue.

Dissatisfaction over wages is further intensified by reports that workers doing the same type of work in other plants are receiving 12 to 37 cents more per hour than Atlas workers receive. Particular plants mentioned were: Crucible Steel, Singer, and Phoenix. The Industrial Secretary produced a copy of the wage rates for foundries in this area, as prepared by the National War Labor Board, which showed Atlas rates to conform to the rates in this release. The problem of low rates was in no way remedied by this, but it served to show that they are not the only foundry workers with this problem, and that some more responsible effort than a "walkout" is necessary to solve the problem.

Decision: Not to stage a "walkout" on Wednesday, May 17, as stated in a notice served through Mr. Cocoa (Shop Steward) on last Saturday morning.

Union "No Good"

There was definite feeling that the Union does not represent the will of the majority of the workers in the plant; that no attention is paid to the workers in the "poussing section". The workers in this group re-

requested that Mr. Cocca send a representative to talk over grievances and other problems. This request was made "sometime ago" and as yet, no representative has come. The non-journeymen call the Union a "Moulders Union", uninterested in conditions of other workers. The shop stewards were charged with deliberate evasion of all requests from laborers for the help of the Union. The in-plant union machinery does not advise management of complaints from the common laborers.

It was stated that the men have not received any official notices of the meetings of the Union. No member of the "pouring crew" has been to a Union meeting recently, nor have more than three of these men been to more than one meeting in more than a year. This was because no notices were given these men.

#### Unequal Pay for Equal Work

Further dissatisfaction is felt because some men continue to work, and earn the same pay that the men earn who pay Union fees, while these other men pay no fees at all. Also, men with practically no experience earn the same wage that experienced workers get.

#### No Classifications for Most Workers

A sore spot among both white and Negro workers is the fact that even though a worker is a chipper, grinder or burner, his pay rate indicated that his work is regarded a common labor. The men feel that work in those first three mentioned categories is skilled or at least semi-skilled and couldn't understand why the pay is much the same as that earned by the common laborers.

#### Workers Feel They Are Too Often Given "Run-Around".

"Brush offs" from representatives of Atlas' Management were described as having occurred in the following manner: When men individually or representing two or three workers would speak (not officially) to some member of Management, one story would be told them. When other individuals would happen to discuss the same thing with the same member of Management, a different story would be told. Promises of better conditions for them in the future were made so often, the men were bored with them.

#### Factors Causing Mistrust

Special instances of workers becoming belligerent about their need for more money were given. These instances show that these men had been given increments and told not to let anyone else know that they were receiving such increments. On one occasion, a worker demanded an increment and threatened to quit if he did not receive it. In the office he was given an increment and told not to say anything about it to the workers. When he returned to the floor, his co-workers demanded to know what happened. He mentioned to them that he had been given the wage increase. The next day, this worker was fired. Whether or not this incident is authentic has not yet been established, but for this report, it is included to show what feeling there is among the workers about what they believe goes on between individual members of Management and individual workers.

The belief that such instances are rampant makes it hard for the workers to trust management.

The smoke from the "pouring room" is considered a menace to the health of the workers at Atlas, and another aggravating factor in the workers' problems.

The men were impatient stating that, for months, they have been given promises and that now they want to see some money "laid on the line". A decision was reached whereby the Industrial Secretary of the Urban League would keep the men advised about progress made.

The men decided to stick to their jobs for thirty days, pending developments of contacts by the Industrial Secretary and other persons working on the problem. It was explained that any negotiations would consume several weeks.